DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 533 FL 023 876

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TITLE Mesocentrism: Teaching Indigenous Mexican Culture in the Classroom.
PUB DATE Apr 96
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, April 8-12, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Content; *Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Education; Grade 7; Grade 8; *Heritage Education; *Indigenous Populations; Instructional Effectiveness; Junior High Schools; *Latin American Culture; Mexican Americans; *Reading Attitudes; Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of a community-based heritage culture program on Chicano students in a southwestern suburban middle school. Subjects were 61 seventh- and eighth-grade students, all Chicanos, with little or no previous instruction in indigenous Mexican culture. The pre- and post-survey, administerd a week piro to and 3 weeks after treatment, was an interest inventory concerning the students' cultural knowledge, self-esteem, goals, reading preferences, reading attitudes, career choice, reading topics, and college goals. The treatment entailed 2 days of lecture, with handouts, and 1 day of dance activity related to Mesoamerican culture. Results show significant differences in the students' familiarity with indigenous Mexican culture, and positive response to the heritage presentations. It is concluded that such exposure to heritage culture adds meaning to students' education, particularly in a culturally diverse context, and adds to self-esteem. Contains 25 references. (MSE)

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Mesocentrism: Teaching Indigenous Mexican Culture in the Classroom

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A paper presented at the

1996 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association

New York City

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Mesocentrism: Teaching Indigenous Mexican Culture in the Classroom

Exposure to a community-based cultural program, the Xinachtli Project, upon Chicana/o students is analyzed through a quasi-experiment. The cultural program is based on Mesocentrism (author's own term for describing indigenous Mexican culture) taught by Chicano community leaders. A pre and post-survey is used to measure cultural awareness, desire, effect, reading preference, self-esteem, and self-concept. Also, informal narratives by the students assist in interpreting the effects of the treatment. Combined results indicate that exposure to the program enhances cultural awareness and voluntary reading preferences among Chicana/os. Integrating ancestral culture of students elicits positive motivation to learning, and the community is a valuable impetus for defining relevant instruction.

An increasing sense of disillusion is felt by teachers and students across the country for the traditional celebration of the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas. Indigenous groups throughout the hemisphere face the irony of acknowledging an explorer whose accidental discovery of the Americas was a precursor to the demise of millions of indigenous peoples (Zinn, 1980). Columbus thought the Natives he encountered were "Indians" because he assumed they were inhabitants of the West Indies on his new Western route to Asia. This marks the beginning of half of millennium of misunderstanding between the colonized Mesoamerican and the colonial European.

One of the Mesoamerican groups affected by European conquest includes the indigenous Mexican and their descendants. The indigenous Mexican had once flourished on the North American continent among Mesoamerican culture, however, disease, enslavement, political subjugation, and religious persecution forced the beliefs and practices of the indigenous Mexican to go underground or merge with Euro-religious practices. The Spanish conquest of Mexico nearly eradicated traditional ceremonies and beliefs that could not be openly practiced under the oppressive reign of Spain that forcibly established new institutions of religion and government. For the colonized subject, the alternative of integrating colonial beliefs became necessary for survival.

Like blowing candles on a cake, ritualized activities can be slow to change and examples of cross-cultural, colonized-colonial, integration are abundant. In the Catholic Church, copal incense is burned as part of a purification ritual, couples to be married are adjoined with a

ceremonial knot, Matachine dancers simulate Aztec dance to honor the church -- these practices originated in Pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Other examples include architecture, food, language, folklore, and social customs. However, the colonial practice of suppressing an indigenous culture may have a negative influence upon subsequent generations of colonial subjects who may not understand, distinguish, and/or acknowledge their hybridized, or appropriated, customs and beliefs.

Mexican Americans and Native Americans share an indigenous ancestry, yet being associated with Native American culture can reflect a colonial stigma ingrained into Chicana/o beliefs and can be exemplified through day-to-day examples; such as calling someone "tonto" which refers to someone who is stupid -- yet the etymology of this word in Mexico can be traced to the Tonto Indians who were stereotyped as being stupid by the Colonial Spanish. The derogatory reference is a well known word among Chicana/os, but its history is not. The desire for the Chicana/o to deny their ancestral culture prevails in their attempt to assimilate into the mainstream society of the United States (Hernández, 1973), yet Chicana/o beliefs share many similarities with Native American culture (Batalla, 1988), despite stereotyped perceptions of Native Americans being a barrier for understanding.

For many Chicana/os, an affiliation to Native American ancestry is usually inferenced by physical features such as skin color; however, acknowledging such an affiliation would mean acknowledging a stigma. Hence, some Mexican Americans choose to consciously disavow themselves from their ethnic ancestry. Yet, Chicana/os may eat food similar to what was eaten during Mesoamerican times, have similar physical features, speak with a dialect that integrates a Mesoamerican language, and have customs and celebrations that originated in Mesoamerican times. They may also acknowledge their affiliation with symbols of Mesoamerican culture such as the stepped-pyramid and the Aztec Calendar, whose images are reproduced upon murals in just about every Mexican-american barrio. However, fully understanding Mesoamerican culture eludes many contemporary Chicana/os partly because they are not actively being taught a sophisticated level of this information in school. Colonial authority maintains a tradition of not

recognizing, even subduing, a colonial subject's ability to understand the world in a complex manner. Paredes (1984) documents the origins of anti-Mexican sentiment that begins as soon as contact between Mexico and the United States began.

Whenever I have an opportunity to speak to a public school classroom, one of my favorite questions to ask is "what did the Aztecs use the pyramids for?" I have consistently received variations of two responses: that is where their kings are buried and that is where they sacrificed people. The first response confuses practices associated with Egyptian pyramids. The second response reflects a colonial exaggeration of barbarism that was used to justify the conquest. I do not want to extrapolate about popular notions describing Pre-Columbian sacrificial practices. That is not the purpose of this paper. I will say that not a single colonizer ever witnessed a human sacrifice and that the originally published second-hand accounts by Bernal Díaz de Castillo were edited by the Catholic church who had a vested interest in converting millions of subjects. The many resplendent examples of cathedrals in Mexico do not readily reveal how they were constructed out of pyramid stone from the temples that were disassembled by Mexican slaves. However, what I am most concerned about and what is missed altogether whenever I ask these questions to children is the scientific and intellectual purpose of the Mesoamerican pyramids that were used to measure the cosmos.

Cultural loss is somewhat being alleviated through an increasing reflective process by some Chicana/os (Godina, 1992). This reflection has manifested itself in recent times by indigenous groups reassessing the Columbus Quincentennary Celebration. It can also be seen in Mexico through the dissent of traditionally subjugated indigenous Mexicans revolting against the government in Chiapas, Mexico. We also know that there has been a tradition of educational neglect pertaining to Chicana/o students (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991). Traditional curriculum has created a vacuum for the Chicana/o to understand their ancestral culture by neglecting rudimentary instruction for both teachers and students.

Some researchers indicates that a strong understanding of ancestral culture, e.g., relating this culture to the present day and projecting this understanding to the future is an important

characteristic attributed to success in school (Caplan, Choy & Whitmore 1992; Hess, Chih-Mei, & McDermott, 1987). For example, Caplan, et. al. (1992) point out that Asian students who have maintained a knowledge of their ancestral culture succeed academically and even surpass their more affluent peers. The relationship of ancestral culture and its efficacy as an impetus for enhancing educational motivation among Chicana/o students is the focus of the study presented here.

Since 1521, Mexicans have been subject to conquests that have aggressively impeded an indigenous cultural evolution. Spain, France, and the United States, contributed to the "mestizaje," or a mixing of blood -- hybridization -- of the indigenous Mexican. The suppressed knowledge related to ancestral culture that Chicana/o students are unable to express, much less, celebrate, may affect their interaction within school and society. Though other variables, predominantly family support, influence student success in school (Caplan et al., 1992), sensitization to original culture reflects a plausible connection for enhancing student ability to succeed at school. However, access to information about indigenous culture has been mostly limited to some community advocacy groups from the Chicano movement who emphasize this indigenous past and have distanced themselves from their Euro-American components (Griswold Del Castillo, 1990).

Distrust toward the professional is pervasive throughout our society (Schön, 1983), but some community support groups have had success in addressing social and educational problems affecting at-risk youth and minorities (Nettles, 1991). However, the success of some of these alternative groups has led to conflicts with the very public school systems they support (Meier, 1991). Community support groups often consist of average citizens without university degrees or teaching certificates (Serow, 1991). These groups often deal with problems unresolved by the social institutions established to serve the community. For example, the community expects the educational system to adjust itself to new problems that include the rise in gang violence, drug abuse, AIDS awareness, and illiteracy. The nature of community support groups puts them at odds with established bureaucracies and the professionals who work within them because the

success of these alternative groups in resolving problems could result in the disenfranchisement of established institutions that were created by the colonial/dominant culture to deal with these issues. Despite bilingual education legislation stipulating that bicultural education be integrated within its programs, there is little curriculum, literature, and research that reflects a sophisticated approach to cultural issues related to the Mexican American student beyond a theoretical level. If cultural topics are broached at all, it is usually through a tourist-approach that does not examine the intellectual, scientific, and cosmological content of Mesoamerica. Some reasons for this include that politics instead of practical pedagogy influences bilingual education in this country (Crawford, 1991), and the serious lack of teachers certified to work in bilingual education (García, 1986; Merino & Faltis, 1993); consequently, it is difficult to expect sophisticated approaches to bicultural education from a teacher population that is not informed about nor required to include such an emphasis.

Background of the Xinachtli Project

The Xinachtli Project, originated by Chicano activists in Phoenix, Arizona, and El Paso, Texas, addresses the loss of ancestral culture. The term "Xinachtli" is a Nahuatl word that means "seed," and is used as a metaphorical expression that describes the seed of culture being nurtured to grow. The Xinachtli Project teaches Mesoamerican culture through a series of presentations and lectures. The program allows for Chicana/o students to become aware of the richness of their ancestral past by relating present-day experiences through symbols, science, and oral language.

There is a ceremonial quality throughout the presentation, especially in the Aztec dance segment. School gatherings and ceremonies are usually administrative affairs that lack ethnic diversity and student cultural self-expression (Deal, 1990). This can be exemplified through a Halloween costume dance, as opposed to recognition of El Día de Los Muertos, or a Christmas play with a nativity scene, as opposed to Kwaanzan. The ceremonies and beliefs of the majority culture permeate the belief systems of most ethnic groups, and not assimilating those beliefs

alienates nonparticipants (Giroux, 1990). This study will seek to determine the Xinachtli Project's effectiveness for enhancing the education of Chicana/os.

Familiarity with Mesoamerican culture is prevalent among Chicana/os (Forbes, 1973), and manifests itself through everyday words of Nahuatl origin. Southwest Spanish and special codes of that language, such as Calo, are influenced by Indian languages (Ornstein-Galicia, 1988). Nahuatl shares both ancient and contemporary usage as the language of Mesoamerica and the Aztecs. In contemporary Mexico, where nearly seven million people speak an indigenous language other than Spanish, Nahuatl is the most spoken among all indigenous languages (Lastra, 1992). Although other etymological influences upon Calo exist, such as Spanish-Gypsy Calo (Reyes, 1988), investigation into Nahuatl influence is valid for interpreting and describing its evolution with Chicana/o students, and could be an educational medium for eliciting cultural pride and enhancing self-concept. The Xinachtli Project allows for students to reflect upon words that have a Nahuatl etymology through a dialogue that begins to engage students in reflection about their linguistic affiliation to their ancestral culture.

Symbols elicit a student's ancestral affiliation, and one universally familiar to Chicana/os is the flag of Mexico, an eagle atop a cactus, which describes the origin of Mexico City. The Aztec calendar is another symbol that is demystified for students who are taught how to read the various symbols/glyphs on the calendar, such as the 20 day-year cycle in one of the central rings. The Aztec calendar integrates the Mesoamerican system of mathematics and also becomes a medium for teaching math. What was once thought of as strictly an aesthetic icon also becomes a practical tool for constructing and comprehending reality, and the student attains the ability to understand a prominent symbol of their culture. Carlos Aceves, one of the Xinachtli Project directors, explains:

> You can think of the symbols as being like a car. You can give a car to a person, but if you don't teach them how to drive it then it's useless. The symbols are only valid for the student when they learn how to use them. (Aceves, interview, 1992)

Tupac Enrique, also one of the project directors, describes that teachers play a critical role in facilitating the instruction of the Xinachtli Project when they participate along with their

class. They, in turn, can continue to positively reinforce instruction in the classroom. Tupac Enrique invokes the "teacher as ethnographer model" whereby the teacher takes an active role in expanding cross-cultural awareness, and this model has been advocated for being able to transcend tourist-approaches to culture (Merino & Faltis, 1993).

Description of the Study

Subjects. The participants in the intervention were 92 seventh and eighth-grade students attending a middle-school in a Southwestern suburb. According to a recent school profile, the total number of students enrolled in this middle-school was slightly over 1000. The ethnic composition of the school was 63% Latino, 33% White, and 3% African-American (YISD, 1990). The majority of the participants were Chicana/o. All of the participants were enrolled in either a reading or a Spanish language class and prior to the treatment had received little or no detailed instruction related to indigenous Mexican culture. Although, the majority of the teachers at the school were of Mexican American ethnicity, their knowledge of indigenous Mexican culture was limited, and not central to their regular pedagogy. None of them were actively teaching information related to indigenous Mexican culture.

Of the 81 paired subjects who took the pre and post-interest survey, the Mexican-American sample of 61 was isolated. Male and female participants remained nearly equal in both overall sample and in the Mexican-American sample.

Interest Inventory. For the pre/post-survey respondents were administered an interest inventory that I created (see appendix A). The instrument consists of 23 multiple-choice questions examining student's cultural knowledge, self-esteem, goals, reading preferences, and attitudes toward reading. Similar to a Likert-survey scale, respondents self-reported data and had five choices:

a. Yes, very much.
b. Yes, somewhat.
c. No, not very much.
d. No, not at all.
e. I don't know.

Students were also asked three open-ended questions about career choice, reading topics, and college goals for which they could respond with a few words or a short sentence.

Data Collection Procedures. The pre/post-surveys were administered by teachers during a regular class session a week prior and three weeks after the treatment. Because of logistical limitations, no control group was used for the study, nor did I pilot-test the survey. Essay response questions also were given to some of the students as part of a journal assignment (e. g., What do you want to be when you grow up? What do you like to read about? Do you plan to go to college?). Also, I took field notes on the three days of the presentations and conducted about 10 hours of informal interviews with Carlos Aceves and Tupac Enrique. A video was made of one of the dance presentations and several photographs were taken throughout the presentations.

Treatment. The treatment entailed two days of lecture and one day of dance; both were conducted in the school auditorium by Tupac Enrique from Phoenix, Arizona. Students were released from their regular classrooms and went to the auditorium for those three days. Upon arrival, students were distributed a five-page handout that contained pictures depicting the Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacán, the central symbol of the Aztec calendar; a graphic describing the year count for the Aztec calendar; and a copy of the Codex Mendoza (see appendix B). The handout contained no readable text other than the picture glyphs. An overhead projector was used to elaborate upon and describe the pictures in the handouts.

During the first part of the lecture, Tupac Enrique described everyday words and slang that have an etymological relationship to Nahuatl. Examples included words that have transferred and evolved into modern English such as *coyote*, *chocolate*, *tomato*, *maize*, and *avocado* (Siméon, 1988). Other examples familiar to Chicana/os included *chile*, *coyote*, *itzcuintli*, and the use of the idioms *itito* and *itote* to describe something big or small. Students and teachers discussed how Nahuatl exists in their everyday language.

Through the lectures Tupac Enrique taught about the Aztec calendar, such as how to read the date and year, and students were familiarized with the twenty-day glyphs and the Mesoamerican system of counting. Demystifying the Aztec calendar from being an aesthetic

symbol of Mexican culture into a readable, practical tool for measuring time and place were described as an important step in this process by Tupac Enrique. Although there is nothing wrong with perceiving the Aztec Calendar as an aesthetic icon, the fact that it is a cosmological tool with much scientific content was brought to the forefront of the lecture/discussion.

On the third day, students were shown a demonstration of Aztec dance. Tupac Enrique considered this event to be important because the student crosses over from being an observer to an active participant. The dance was conducted in a ceremonial manner, and at the beginning, a conch shell was blown to the four directions. The conch shell invokes the spirit of the dance, and was also blown to signal the end of the dance. Students who volunteered to dance were led through various steps following a rhythmic beat on a drum. Copal incense was burned in a ceramic censer, and the air in the auditorium filled with a piney odor much like a forest. "Ayoyotes," the traditional leg garment for the Aztec dancer, were used in the dance and made a sound like cascading water. By using these ceremonial objects, the four elements integral to indigenous culture manifest themselves. These are fire, air, water, and earth. The dance was a group activity that reinforced previously taught concepts through physical application. The auditorium was transformed into a place that is quite different from the middle-school frenzy of the lunch hour.

Part of the appeal of these series of lecture was later revealed to me by Tupac Enrique as his being a non-traditional figure in the school. He is an outsider who challenges the existing order of the educational structure. He is physically agile, has long hair, and has a deadly serious attitude about helping Chicana/o students -- and the students sense his commitment to them and are also attracted to his rebel-like and emancipatory identity. Traditional male teachers usually do not Aztec dance nor wear their hair long. To some extent, the Xinachtli Project's popularity could be due to the presenter's own dynamic individual presence among the students.

Data Analysis. Data was entered using the statistical program SPSS and t-tests were run with paired samples for the pre and post-survey results. For statistical analysis, question responses were collapsed to Yes (a., b.) and No (c., d.) responses. A Yes response was scored as

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a 1, and a No response was scored as a 2. Participants were dropped from the pre-post dyad if they left a survey question blank or selected to forego answering a question and checked "e. I don't know" -- this would vary by only two or three dyads.

Because some of the questions tapped similar information, they were grouped within one of three general categories:

a. Awareness of ancestral culture: questions 2,3, 20, 21, 22, and 23.
b. Desire to learn about other cultures: questions 4, 7, 9, 12, 16, 17, and 18.
c. Affect: questions 5, 6, 8, and 15.

Because this analysis was conducted at a later date, the scoring was different; Yes = 1, No = 2, don't know = 0. Pre- and post-survey means were computed for each category, and a t-test analysis was run on this data.

Results

The paired t-test analysis indicated that there were significant differences in student's responses to questions 1, 2, 3, 22, and 23. Table 1 gives the pre- and post-intervention means and standard deviations for each of these questions (see Table 1). It is interesting to note that during the pretest students felt comfortable to indicate "yes" to question 1, $t(56) = 2.46$, $p < .05$, "Would you say you know a lot about your own culture?" Yet, after the treatment students were more inclined to say that they knew less about their culture. This difference probably indicates how some students realized that they knew less about their culture after being exposed to extensive and in-depth cultural information in the treatment that was not being acknowledged or taught in the regular school curriculum.

Overall, familiarity with Aztec culture increased such as indicated by question 2, "Are you familiar with the Aztec culture?", $t(39) = -2.24$, $p < .05$, showing that students had become more familiar with the topic. Question 3, "Would you say you know a lot about Aztec culture?" also reflects an increase in familiarity, $t(51) = -2.43$, $p < .05$. Two items reflecting the highest gains of the interest inventory indicated increased familiarity with both the Aztec Calendar, question 22, $t(47) = -2.59$, $p < .05$; and Aztec Dance, question 23, $t(48) = -3.27$, $p < .005$.

The three grouped questions describing awareness, affect, and desire were analyzed with a one-sample t-test that grouped mean scores from 61 participants who answered each of the questions in the three categories. Table 2 gives the pre- and post-intervention means and standard deviations for these question categories (see Table 2). Only the grouping for awareness resulted in significant positive change after the treatment, $t(59) = 10.27$, $p < .05$. Students were more likely to be aware and familiar with Aztec culture after the treatment.

The statistically significant questions are all related to cultural familiarity (1, 2, 3, 22, 23), and this gain could have contributed to subsequent motivation students had for learning more about Mexican culture, and other cultural topics, by voluntarily reading more content-area books. On question 25 in the post-test written responses, students indicated more interest in reading books about topics related to Mesocentrism that were not at all mentioned in the pre-test and were not part of subsequent class reading assignments:

Anthropology	Aztecs, Aztec history
Indians	Mexican history
Mexican heroes	Mexican Indians
Mexican Revolution	Pancho Villa
Places about Mexico	Low Rider Magazines

The narrative responses also reflect a positive influence by the treatment upon reading preferences and attitudes toward reading.

Essay Responses. An essay question that was administered separately from the interest inventory gives some insight as to the effects of the treatment. All narrative responses favored the Xinachtli Project's presentation, and its future context. Students offered these general positive responses to the cultural program: [parentheses mine]

> I think that it was good to remember our ancestors and to know where we come from and what kind of indians we are. The aztecs did amazing things, and they were very intelligent. I think we should be proud to have a race like that who survives for 500 years and still lives today. It is good to keep in touch with our culture.
>
> The Aztec culture is really smart because it knows about life. They are like scientists. They were smart. In the future I hope more people learn the ways the Aztecs lived.
>
> We still have Aztec traditions, and I think they will never end.
>
> Maybe the people that are not Aztec may like to know about the culture and the Aztecs because it is very interesting. They have alot of interesting things.

One student looked forward to sharing new knowledge about the Aztec calendar with other students and teachers in high school:

> It will be really nice to know how to use the Aztec calendar because in high school if a teacher wants you to do a special [report,] you could show them how to use the Aztec calendar.

Some students describe a romantic sense of tranquillity in the ancestral past and compared this with the present:

> In the past they didn't have a good T.V. or VCR, but they use to live in peace and now that we have everything we are always fighting.

> Before everything people [Aztecs] did wasn't bad to them.
> Everything would be OK. Nowadays, the world is always wild
> Of course it was wild before, but not as much as now.

> In the past, they did not have gangs like today. I think that the past was better than todays life. our Aztec culture is nice.

One student made this prediction about current education trends:

> It is good that the teachers teach the students when they are kids, for they can know their culture, and they can be more interest[ed] in the Aztecs and [it can] be important for them. If we continue like this [these] ways, like we are not learning about the Aztec culture, [then] I think the Aztec culture is going to disappear.

Other students who responded favorably to the program indicated that it would be misinterpreted by people who do not share an emic perspective:

> The future of the Aztec culture is that people won't understand it and the Aztecs will.

Several students wrote statements reflecting an ownership of the culture:

> I eat tortillas and they invented tortillas. I think the future of the Aztecs will never end because most of our ancestors are Aztecs... we still have Aztec traditions and I think they will never end.

> I thought it was very interesting it helped me learn about my ancestors. Before I didn't care about any of those things I always hated history but after that presentation I changed my mind something got into me that just made me change my mind about my ancestors and their history.

Limitations of the Study. The instrument used to measure the effects of the treatment was content oriented and the treatment integrates ceremony, symbol, as well as, content. The instrument might have recorded other gains if these could have been differentiated. The instrument should have been pilot-tested. Also, the knowledge conveyed by the program may

not be immediately measurable or isolated by the boundary of one program treatment, and a control group would have aided describing the effectiveness of the treatment. The innovation of culture is perhaps difficult to quantitatively measure so soon after the treatment even given the three weeks that were allotted between pre and post-survey, but may require a more longitudinal examination that takes into account other variables, such as class and gender, related to identity formation that are learned at both home and work, in addition to school. For this reason, it would be inappropriate to derive definite claims from these observations, but rather, integrate some of the more plausible observations for background on a more sophisticated study.

Discussion

The symbols of indigenous Mexican culture become more accessible for students whereas before those symbols may have been complicit impediments to their cultural identity; loosely associated to a stigma. Once demystified, these symbols are perhaps able to be used by the students as archetypes that Jung (1964) describes as guide posts for activities that help to elicit positive self-esteem and a sense of place within the world.

Establishing a sense of place within the world, invoking cosmological awareness, is one of the important organizing features of Mesocentrism. Students are given a path to define their sense of location and time within their reality. Mesocentrism constructs reality by establishing an orientation between the earth and cosmos. This orientation accounts for a human being's physical location and relationship to time. The Aztec Calendar is oriented to an original position, the great pyramid at Teotihuacan. With the calendar one can calculate the orbit of Venus, the Solstice and Equinox of the Earth and the four seasons. Human beings are central within that cosmological pattern, and this ancestral knowledge was originally crucial for the ancient Mesoamerican to evolve in their existence from a hunter-gatherer to an agrarian society. Then as now, human beings can trace their place upon that clock and can be central to this determination and not a subjugated by-product of it. Time is not the sole measure of a human existence, but rather, an instrument to be used by humans for understanding the world. The

Aztec calendar is more accurate than the contemporary Julian calendar that was created under the leadership of Julius Caesar for the timely collection of taxes.

Adolescents are in a constant state of physical, social, and psychological change. For a Chicana/os to perhaps have a symbolic ballast, such as an Aztec calendar, pyramid, or glyph, would relieve some of the stress associated with their changing world. Ethnic identity can be complex and problematic for Chicana/os. An understanding of the symbolism associated with ethnic identity is important in developing a foundation for dealing with more complex issues that are encountered as we evolve in our society. In the study presented here, the impetus for that type of instruction arose from community efforts in a bottom-up approach by community leaders who are driven by a sense of urgency in light of educational deficits that are all too common in the Barrio.

Mesocentrism taps into "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) that would create a viable and nurturing dialogue between the teacher and the student's community to include cultural elements that can contribute to the authentic construction of meaning in the classroom. This type of curriculum does not 'cheer-lead' a Mexican American student through culture by sharing the taste of tacos with the class for a few days of the year, but invokes a more sophisticated understanding of the tradition of knowledge that is lying on the surface of their day-to-day existence.

Demographic projections indicate a large increase of Mexican American students. Existing teacher education programs are struggling to compensate for this student increase, and teachers trained to fill positions in ESL and bilingual education programs are inadequately prepared. This is partly because the education of language minorities is perhaps being viewed as a temporary curriculum (García, 1986), yet the increase is not temporary and will most likely continue. This demographic shift may be felt as an encroachment upon established policies structured by the majority culture (Giroux, 1990, 1988). Public school curriculum should respond to these demographic changes. The introduction of multicultural curriculum is a progressive step toward coping with these shifting demographics although this curriculum

change has been met with resistance (Sleeter, 1989). If schools are indeed nurturing institutions, then equal weight must be given to the cultural instruction of students who do not belong to the majority culture. Educational curriculum that emphasizes language instruction as a component of culture falls short of the substance necessary to enrich and enlighten students who do not pertain to the majority culture. Not challenging language minority students, such as Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans is a common approach that views them as not being able to handle content (Moll, 1988).

Students and teachers need to learn to become critical of their culture if they are to be emancipated by it. Mesocentrism empowers Chicanas/os through a positive orientation that is a foundation for enhancing education. Culture and its perceptions are not static but are in a constant state of change. New applications of ancestral knowledge must be creatively constructed within the classroom. Constructing a pyramid to understand the solstices and equinoxes of the planet and projecting ancestral knowledge in new directions is only confined by the boundaries of the imagination that is nurtured in the classroom.

Implementing a reflective pedagogy to continuously assess and reassess the varying needs of students would benefit all ethnic groups by allowing them to mutually understand each others differences (Godina, 1992). Ideally, this would create an environment that is both positive and inquisitive for the student. Minority students already utilize a form of reflection in negative reassessment of the educational process that is structured by the majority culture. McDermott (1985) perceives this as an achievement of pariah status by minority students who select to participate in a subculture that circumvents instruction by the majority culture. The minority students attainment of pariah status is reinforced by the negative expectations of the majority culture. Pariah status can be seen as a viable reflective alternative on the part of the minority student. If the student cannot fit into the educational framework imposed by the majority culture, the student will reassess their situation and select to fit into the subculture of school failure and achieve status in that context.

Curriculum needs to move beyond simple recall of cultural knowledge and allow members of varying cultures to internalize and implement the symbols that are important and unique to their particular ethnic group. Symbols of culture are not exclusive to any particular culture. Symbols of culture, such as the Mesoamerican pyramid and the Irish four-leaf clover, can be shared between ethnic groups equally to evoke a mutual understanding between diverse groups. Similarly, the intervention also engaged White and African-American students into an understanding of familiar Calo terminology they shared in the middle-school.. Encouraging reflection in students and teachers to allow them to critically discover and share the symbols of culture would nurture an environment that would be exclusive of racial divisions. Projecting this understanding toward the future is a critical step in this evolution. By enhancing understanding between minority and majority cultures, the resources that are offered by both cultures can be used to their optimum advantage. Investigations into ancestral culture are a valid step toward understanding the essence of our existence. Students learning of those ancestral traditions and symbols would promote healthy manifestations of archetypes that would allow them to derive meaning from their description of reality and succeed beyond the classroom.

Teachers, as always, are the facilitators for students accessing their culture. The teachers' understanding is a cornerstone for effective multicultural education. In a survey by the Phoenix Union High School District (1992), teachers felt that the content conveyed by the Xinachtli Project was valuable for improving student self-esteem. The Xinachtli Project stands as a cultural- education model that offers a means for teachers to meet some of the needs of culturally diverse students. This is one of the reasons why the program is successful and is in high demand in Phoenix, Arizona.

In the future, it is important to explore efficient ways of disseminating this knowledge and the emancipatory ideology that embodies it. As teachers and students begin to diversify and reflect their understanding of their world and themselves, it is hoped that the established order of education redefines itself into one that embraces diversity within individuals and the world.

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Mesocentrism constructs a reality that is relevant to the cultural identity of human beings as we continue to evolve and to reach higher goals once those needs have been fulfilled.

Giroux (1992) describes a "language of remembrance" that is a similar ideological principle related to this study:

> ...educational leaders need to be skilled in the language of remembrance. Remembrance rejects knowledge as merely an inheritance, with transmission as its only form of practice. Remembrance sees knowledge as a social and historical construction that is always the object of struggle. It is not preoccupied with the ordinary but with what is distinctive and extraordinary. It is concerned not with societies that are quiet, that reduce learning to reverence, procedure and whispers, but with forms of public life that are noisy, that are engaged in dialogue and vociferous speech. In this view, truth is not contained solely in practice; it is also part of the world of recollections, historical memory, and the tales and stories of those who have established a well-known legacy of democratic struggle and who have too often been silenced, excluded, or marginalized. (Giroux, 1992)

By seeking to expand knowledge of what is already known, or remembered, we can perhaps create a foundation for subsequent pursuits by Chicana/o students without reservations about the authenticity of their foundation. By correctly addressing the inter-cultural issues of Chicana/o education, there may be a dialogue of acceptance that can perhaps reflect some authentic meaning and truth for students who have traditionally not participated in the classroom.

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Table 1 Means (and standard deviations) for statistically significant items on the pre- and post-intervention

Question	Pre-intervention M	Pre-intervention SD	Post-intervention M	Post-intervention SD
1. Would you say you know a lot about your own culture?	1.42	.49	1.59*	.49
2. Are you familiar with the Aztec culture?	1.6	.49	1.4*	.49
3. Would you say you know a lot about Aztec culture?	1.82	.38	1.65*	.48
22. Are you familiar with the Aztec calendar?	1.7	.45	1.45*	.5
23. Are you familiar with Aztec dance?	1.85	.35	1.57**	.5

*$p < .05$
**$p < .005$

Table 2 Grouped means (and standard deviations) for scores on the pre- and post-intervention by question category

Question Category	Pre-intervention M	Pre-intervention SD	Post-intervention M	Post-intervention SD
Cultural Awareness	1.81	.25	1.67*	.31
Desire to learn about other cultures	1.41	.28	1.41	.26
Affect	1.17	.19	1.16	.23

*$p < .05$

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